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ART. I.—CHRISTIAN OBLIGATION WITH RESPECT TO  
THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD.

No creature of God was made for itself alone. The flower of the field, the oak of the forest, the sun in the firmament, and “the cattle upon a thousand hills,” were all formed that they might be instrumental in promoting the welfare and comfort of each other. To suppose, then, that MAN, who occupies so conspicuous a place in this great system; *man*, who is endowed with a rational as well as an active nature; who is made capable of acting upon a *plan*, and living to an *end*, was made, or is at liberty to act for himself alone; to make, each one, his own enjoyment and glory the ultimate purpose of his being;—would be to adopt a sentiment as unreasonable as it is degrading. The powers which God has given us; the relations which we bear to him; the benevolent activity of which we are obviously capable; and the rich and unremitting goodness of which we are the subjects, and of which we have ever been the subjects since we had a being;—all demonstrate that intellectual and moral action is our appropriate sphere; and that either indolence, or a course of action which does not embrace the good of

ART. V.—*Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions, and on other subjects. From the last London edition. Philadelphia. R. W. Pomeroy. A. Waldie, printer, 1831.*

*Essays on the Pursuit of Truth, on the Progress of Knowledge, and the Fundamental Principles of all Evidence and Expectation. By the author of Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions. Philadelphia. R. W. Pomeroy. A. Waldie, printer, 1831.*

THE ESSAYS, of which we have here given the titles, have attracted no small degree of attention in Great Britain, and are, doubtless, the production of a mind of high cultivation, and extraordinary refinement. There is manifested in every part of the work a liberal and independent spirit; a love of truth which disdains to be trammelled; a metaphysical acumen which penetrates the abstrusest subjects; and a nice moral discrimination, indicating a long and familiar acquaintance with the science of ethics. We have seldom encountered an author for whose abilities we have been constrained to feel a higher respect; and we are of opinion that he will gain an unusual ascendancy over the judgment of his readers, generally. We were led to entertain this high estimation of the talent with which these Essays were written, before we noticed the exalted eulogy of the Westminster Review, on the first of these volumes. The language of the Reviewer is, "If a man could be offered the paternity of any modern book that he chose, he would not hazard much by deciding, that next after the 'Wealth of Nations,' he would request to be honoured with a relationship to the 'Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions.' And again, "It would have been an honourable and pleasant memory to have written a book so *totus teres atque rotundus*, so finished in its parts, and so perfect in their union, as, 'Essays on the Formation of Opinions,' &c. Like one of the great statues of antiquity, it might have been broken into fragments, and each separated limb would have pointed to the existence of some interesting whole, of which the value might be surmised from the beauty of the specimen." By most, perhaps, this praise will be thought somewhat extravagant,

but after making all due allowance, there will be much remaining in the *Essays* of this anonymous author, which cannot be easily rivalled.

Upon the publication of the second edition of the "*Essays, on the Formation and Publication of Opinions,*" we find it noticed in the same Review, but probably by a different critic, in the following manner, "It gives us no ordinary pleasure to find that a second edition has been called for of this very useful volume. It is one of the signs of the times.....The design is excellent, and the execution more than creditable. A popular manner has been studied by the writer, and with success. The train of thought is simple, without being superficial, and is followed at once with ease and with interest." The principal topics which are treated in these volumes are, the utility of the knowledge of truth, and its invariable connexion with happiness—the importance of cherishing a sincere love of truth, fearless of consequences—the independence of our belief on the will—the sources of diversity of opinion among men—Belief, or opinion, whether properly an object of moral approbation and disapprobation—of rewards and punishments. Besides these principal topics, there are several short essays on subjects of minor importance. In the second volume, the author resumes and pursues his favourite subject; the importance of truth—the obstacles which stand in the way of impartial investigation—the duty of inquiry—the free publication of opinions—the progress of knowledge,—and the uniformity of causation. On the *Essay, on the last subject here mentioned*, there is an able article in the number of the *Edinburgh Review*, for January, 1831, in which, the correctness of the author's principle, as it relates to miracles, is successfully controverted.

It is not our object to enter into a discussion of all the principles and points brought into view in these ingenious *Essays*; but to confine ourselves to two inquiries, of great moral and practical importance. The first is, *the responsibility of man for his belief or opinions*; the second, *whether any testimony is sufficient to establish a fact which is a departure from the laws of nature.*

The ground assumed and ingeniously defended by our author, will be best understood by a few brief extracts from the seventh section of his "*Essay on the Formation of Opinions.*" p. 57.

“By the universal consent of the reason and feelings of mankind, what is involuntary, cannot involve any merit or demerit on the part of the agent. Results which are not the consequences of volition, cannot be the proper objects of moral praise and blame. . . . . It follows, that those states of the understanding which we term belief, doubt, and disbelief, inasmuch as they are not voluntary, nor the result of any exertion of the will, imply neither merit nor demerit in him who is the subject of them. Whatever be the state of a man’s understanding in relation to any possible proposition, it is a state or affection devoid equally of desert and culpability. The nature of an opinion cannot make it criminal. In relation to the same subject, one may believe, another may doubt, and a third disbelieve, and all with equal innocence.

“There may, it is true, be considerable merit or demerit attached to the manner in which an inquiry is prosecuted. The labour and research which a man bestows, in order to determine any important question, and the impartiality with which he conducts the examination, may be entitled to our warmest applause. On the other hand, it is reprehensible for any one to be swayed in his conduct by interest or passion, to reject opportunities of information, to be designedly partial in examining evidence, to be deaf to whatever is offered on one side of a question, and lend all his attention to the other. . . . .

“No one, perhaps, will dispute, that when a man acts without intentional partiality in the examination of a question, he cannot be at all culpable for the effect which follows, whether the research terminate in faith or incredulity; because it is the necessary and involuntary consequence of the views presented to his understanding, without the slightest interference of choice: but, it will probably be alleged, that in so far as belief, doubt, and disbelief, have been the result of wilful partiality of attention, they may be regarded with propriety as culpable, since it is common to blame a man for those things, which, although involuntary in themselves, are the result of voluntary acts. To this it may be replied, that it is, to say the least, a want of precision to apply blame in such a manner: it is always more correct to regard men as culpable on account of their voluntary acts, than on account of the results over which volition has no immediate control. There would, nevertheless, be little objection to considering opinions as reprehensible, in so far as they were the result of unfair investigation, if it could be rendered a useful or practical principle. In all cases where we make involuntary effects the objects of moral reprehension, it is because they are certain proofs or positive indications of the voluntary acts which preceded them.

Opinions, however, are not effects of this kind: they are not positive indications of any voluntary acts: they furnish no criterions of the fairness or unfairness of investigation, since the most opposite results, the most contrary opinions, may ensue from the same degree of impartiality and application. . . . Belief, doubt, and disbelief, therefore, can never, even in the character of indications of antecedent voluntary acts, be the proper objects of moral reprehension or commendation."

From these quotations, the opinions of the author will be readily understood: it will be seen that in no case can we be praiseworthy or culpable, on account of the opinions which we form. And in these sentiments he is by no means singular; several of the most distinguished men, in Great Britain have publicly avowed the same. We refer particularly to the Lord Chancellor of England, and the late Sir James M'Intosh; and as far as the Westminster Review may be considered an index of public sentiment, this opinion seems to have taken firm possession of a considerable portion of the reading population of Great Britain.

The author of these Essays, however, seems to be sensible that he is opposing what has been the generally received opinion. He takes pains to account for the prevalence of a sentiment opposite to that for which he pleads. And, indeed, the fact cannot be denied, that, in all countries where ethics have been an object of attention, it has been held as an axiom, that men were responsible for their belief and opinions, in certain cases. So far as men have been agreed on this point, there is a presumption that there exists, in reason and nature, some solid foundation for the opinion. But as there seems to be room for some diversity of opinion on this subject; and as the commonly received opinion has been called in question by men of great name and sagacity; it is possible that the world may have been, until this time, in an error. Until, however, this is clearly demonstrated, the presumption remains in favour of the old opinion. But omitting all appeals to the common consent of mankind, let us come directly to the discussion of the point itself.

The first thought which strikes us in meditating on this subject, is, that if men are in no case responsible for their belief or opinions, then there is no such thing as moral responsibility. If men's opinions are in no case proper objects of moral approbation or disapprobation, their actions, which

depend for their character on their opinions, cannot be reprehensible. It cannot be morally wrong to act in accordance with an innocent opinion. If there is no culpability in a man's believing that he may take away the life of an old miser, there cannot be any criminality in his doing the deed, which he has persuaded himself is innocent. Thus, this doctrine leads to the subversion of all moral distinctions.

But the ingenious author admits, and strenuously maintains, that man is responsible for his volitions, as the universal opinion of men ever has been that for our voluntary states of mind we are accountable. Yet it is difficult to understand how my volitions can be wrong, when the opinions on which they often absolutely depend, are free from all blame. Suppose a man to be fully persuaded in his mind, that private property was an unauthorized invasion of the common rights of mankind; if he might entertain this opinion with perfect innocence, how could it be wrong to act agreeably to this persuasion, and to appropriate to his own use the property of another? If, while the opinion is innocent, the action which accords with it is immoral, then, the consequence would follow, that a man might not do what he innocently believes is right.

It is impossible to separate voluntary actions from belief or opinions; if the former are culpable, so are the latter, on which they depend for their character. Voluntary action owes its moral quality to the motive by which it is prompted. If the motive be pure and good, the volition is so also; and if the motive be evil, so is the voluntary action. Separate the volition from the motive which produces it, and you destroy the moral character of the action. A man resolves to kill his neighbour. This purpose is a voluntary state of the mind, and is wicked; but why? because it is prompted by a malignant feeling; but suppose that this purpose was produced by nothing else but the desire of self-preservation, or the desire to protect the innocent from lawless violence; who does not see that the same volition may be good or bad, according to the motive by which it is produced? Well, if the volition receives its complexion from the motive or affection producing it, then certainly praise or blame attaches to motives, as much as to volitions. But these internal motives or affections depend for their existence and character, on the opinions which have obtained a firm hold of the mind. The malignant feeling which produces the purpose to kill a man, is the

effect of an erroneous persuasion or opinion. As, suppose I have through prejudice taken up the opinion, that some man is the enemy of God, and a great obstacle to the progress of his Church, and that by putting him out of the way, I should be doing service to God and the public; is it not manifest, that if there be responsibility any where, opinion or belief must come in for its share, since this is the true origin of the culpable action? But if the opinion is innocent, so is the feeling which flows from it; so is the volition prompted by this motive; and so is the action which is the result of the voluntary purpose. Hence it is evident, that the consequence of this doctrine is the subversion of all distinction between right and wrong; between virtue and vice.

The ingenious author admits that opinion is, sometimes, the effect of voluntary states of the mind, and, on that account, it has become often the object of moral approbation or disapprobation; but this, he thinks, is not exactly correct, but is transferring the moral character of the action, from the volition to which it properly belongs, to the belief or opinion, to which it does not appertain. But even admitting the propriety of considering that which is the criterion of the moral character of our volitions as the proper object of praise or blame, he does not think that our belief or opinions would, even in this case, be the proper object of condemnation or approbation: "Opinions," says he, "are not indications of any voluntary acts; they furnish no evidence of the fairness or unfairness of investigation; since the most opposite results, the most contrary opinions, may arise from the same degree of impartiality and application." Here, in our opinion, is the radical error of the moral system of the ingenious author of these Essays. He seems to receive it as a principle, that, in no case, where there is diversity of opinion, the evidence of truth is so clear, that none can or do mistake respecting it, except through prejudice, inattention, or some want of fidelity and impartiality, in the mind of him who falls into error. There may, indeed, be truths, and truths of a moral nature too, so situated as to evidence, in relation to the minds of different persons, that in the exercise of equal diligence and impartiality, men may come to opposite results, or embrace different opinions; but that this is generally the case, we hold to be a practical error of great magnitude. If this were indeed the fact, then the pursuit of truth would be nugatory; then there could be no duty incumbent on any man

in regard to it; because, however honest, diligent, and impartial the person might be, there would exist just the same probability of arriving at an erroneous, as a true opinion. Upon this principle, the high moral obligation of searching after truth, on which this writer so forcibly and frequently insists, is utterly subverted; for when men have no probability of finding truth rather than error, there is no moral obligation to pursue it. And this involves the very absurd opinion, that, generally, truth is accompanied with no better nor clearer evidence, than error. Now, if there be such a thing as truth, its characteristic must be, that it possesses evidence of being truth; and error is destitute of the evidence of truth. We have admitted, indeed, that relatively to the situation of particular minds, the evidence of truth may be so concealed or involved, that it is not perceived; and error, in such cases, may seem to be more probable than truth, even when there is a sincere desire to come at the truth; and these we are willing to consider as exceptions to the general rule. But, commonly, the evidence of truths which have any relation to moral conduct, is sufficiently within the reach of the honest inquirer; and if he adopts error, the reason must be, because he has been wanting in diligence, attention, or impartiality. He is, therefore, in all such cases responsible for his belief, as much as he can be for any thing; and if this is not, in any case, a proper object of moral approbation or condemnation, then, as was before shown, nothing is. For, as to the true point on which moral responsibility rests, we cannot but think, that the author enters into unnecessary refinement. Indeed, it is not correct that volition, taken in philosophic strictness, is the sole object of our moral approbation or disapprobation. We have already seen, that the moral character of the volition depends on the motive, and the internal motive or affection which prompts to volition gives it its moral character; and the nature of such an affection in a rational, accountable creature, is intimately and inseparably connected with belief or opinion. When men exercise their moral faculty in judging of the moral character of actions, they never enter into these nice distinctions. They take the action with all the preceding and accompanying circumstances, and form a correct opinion, without metaphysical discrimination. Thus, an immoral action, if you separate it from the volition which produced it, has no moral character; and the volition, considered separately from the quality of the motive, is no object of praise or blame; and the motive could not be what it is, unless the



person entertained certain opinions; and the truth or falsehood of these opinions depends on the diligence and fidelity with which the great duty of forming opinions was performed. Now, in regard to all these consecutive acts, the agent is responsible; and it is not correct to confine his moral responsibility solely to the volition; or to the action; or to the motive; or to the forming of his opinions; but we take the whole together, as combining to form one moral act; and all further refinement only serves to bewilder the mind, and to render obscure and doubtful, that which otherwise would be perfectly evident.

To show the inconsistency of this opinion with the author's belief of the duty of impartially searching after truth, we will suppose the case of a man's entertaining the opinion, that there is no such thing as truth; or that the knowledge of truth is unattainable by us; or, that it is of no importance, for it matters not what we believe. Now this is a very supposable case, for all these opinions have been held by one and another. Then, we ask, what becomes of the obligation of these persons to inquire after the truth? They, according to the principle which we are considering, are in no respect responsible for their opinions; they cannot be considered as culpable for their belief or opinions. If then they may innocently entertain these opinions, there can be no moral obligation on them to act contrary to their own belief. This would be the greatest of moral absurdities. It appears, therefore, that this writer is not consistent with himself, in insisting on the obligation, which all men are under to search diligently and impartially after the truth; and yet maintaining that men are, in no case, responsible for their opinions. The tendency of this doctrine, therefore, is to subvert all moral obligation of every kind; and also to render the pursuit of truth itself useless.

In all cases of this kind, the decision must be in accordance with the common judgment of men. To the moral sense of the human race, and not to the refined and metaphysical reasoning of philosophers, must the appeal be ultimately made. And to this tribunal we are willing to bring the cause, and are persuaded that the decision will not be ambiguous, or unfavourable to our opinion. Men have existed, who were firmly persuaded that it was right for them to take away the lives of others. Under the influence of superstition and fanaticism, the opinion has not only been entertained, but the fact has been perpetrated. Ravallac, for example, when he

assassinated Henry IV. of France, was fully persuaded that he was doing God service. Those parents, who, under the influence of a cruel superstition, offer up to their idols their own children, are certainly persuaded that they are performing a good action; for nothing but such a persuasion could overcome their natural affection. Most persecutors of others, on account of their religious belief, are of opinion that they ought to inflict such punishments on heretics. No doubt, many thieves and robbers have persuaded themselves, that every man has a right to whatever he needs, in the possession of whomsoever it may be found. Under the influence of cupidity, a murderer adopts the opinion, that there can be no harm in taking away the life of a decrepit old miser, or some rich old woman, as by this means, the wealth which they have neither the will nor capacity to enjoy, will be thrown into circulation, and will contribute to the happiness of multitudes. Is there no moral evil attached to such opinions? The voice of mankind says there is; but by philosophy, it seems, the discovery has been made, that the world has ever been labouring under a grievous mistake, in relation to this matter. We are now informed, from high authority, that belief or opinion is no proper object of censure or approbation. Opinions, it is said, do not depend on volition, and men ought not to be held responsible for them. And Sir James Mackintosh is of opinion, that the evils of controversy and persecution can never be eradicated until this principle is established among men. But we trust, it has been made manifest to the reader, that the universal reception of this doctrine would sanction every kind of persecution, and would open the flood-gates to every species of vice—murder and robbery not excepted. This, indeed, must be the inevitable consequence, unless it can be demonstrated, that such opinions as those mentioned above, never have been, nor can be entertained by any man: or, that men may be guilty for willing and acting, in exact accordance with their own opinions. But certainly, men are capable under the influence of wicked motives, of adopting, and confidently entertaining opinions at war with every valuable institution and relation in life. And we are sure, that if it is once received as a maxim that there is no guilt in entertaining such opinions, men will not be restrained from perpetrating the most horrid crimes, and that without the fear of remorse.

In this case we see the verification of the common proverb, that “*extremes meet.*” The very evils which have arisen

from holding, that one man is responsible for all his opinions to his fellow men, who happen to be in authority, will be produced in a form still more terrific from this opposite doctrine, that man is not morally responsible for any of his opinions; not even to his Creator. For as the first has led to innumerable persecutions; so, the latter will sanction persecution of every kind, if only the persecutor can be of opinion, that he is doing right. The Inquisitors may, upon this principle, resume their labours; for although, it is true, that the victims of their fanatic rage, ought not to be molested for their opinions; yet, if they entertain the belief that they may be tortured, hanged, or burned, there is nothing morally wrong in this opinion; and if the opinion is not wrong, it is irrational to suppose, that merely acting in accordance with an innocent opinion, can be morally wrong.

The Westminster Reviewer, who entirely concurs in the opinion of our author, makes the same distinction between holding an opinion, and attending to, or, as he expresses it, "dealing with evidence:" and Dr. Wardlaw is greatly ridiculed for his dissent from the opinions of Mr. Brougham, delivered in his speech when he was inaugurated as the Rector of the University of Glasgow. Dr. Wardlaw, however, is no more to be blamed for his opinions, however bigoted they may be, than any other man. It would seem, from the manner in which he is treated by the reviewer, that there exists an implied exception from the general rule, in regard to clergymen, for which profession he manifests no great respect. But our only reason for referring to this Review is, to make a remark on the manner in which it treats the argument of Dr. Wardlaw, derived from the fact, that according to the sacred Scriptures, not only is man responsible for his belief, but every thing is made to depend on faith. Now it would have been honest in this writer to deny the authority of the Bible, as it is evident he docs in heart: but, no—this course would not answer. He did not wish to encounter the obloquy to which an open profession of infidelity might expose him. He, therefore, proceeds upon the supposition, that the Scriptures are of authority, and attacks Dr. Wardlaw in the following remarkable manner:

"Dr. Wardlaw is prodigiously in earnest to convince the world, that the Scripture attaches the greatest merit to faith, and the greatest demerit to the want of it. We knew not that so much

effort on this subject was necessary; but be that as it may, this at least is certain, that the Scripture can inculcate nothing that is absurd in point of reason, or mischievous in point of morality. We have seen, that it would be absurd in point of reason, and mischievous in point of morality, to ascribe merit or demerit to belief. This, therefore, is what the Scriptures cannot do. We have seen that it is most true in point of reason, and sound in point of morality, to ascribe merit and demerit, even the highest, to the proper and improper modes of dealing with evidence. The man who deals properly with evidence, is the man who has faith; the man who deals improperly with it, is the man who is without faith. Now it is possible, though not very common, for a man to deal faithfully with evidence and yet to come to the wrong conclusion. It is also very possible, and unhappily very common, that a man who has never given himself any concern about evidence—should hold the right opinion. Notwithstanding this, the former is the man who has the merit of dealing virtuously, the latter is the man who has the demerit of dealing wickedly, with evidence. Here the man who has the wrong opinion, is the man who has faith, according to the Scriptures: the man who has the right opinion is the man who, be the opinion what it may, is destitute of faith. Faith, in short has nothing to do with creeds. Of two men, the one even an atheist, the other a sound believer, it may be that the atheist is the man who has faith according to the Scripture: and that the sound believer is the man who is destitute of faith, according to the Scripture; that the atheist is possessed of all the merit, the sound believer of all the demerit, which the Scripture ascribes to the possession or want of this saving grace. As we have shown, that, of all classes of men, the clergy, as a class, are the most constant and the deepest offenders against the virtue of dealing rightly with evidence, it follows, that of all classes of men living, the clergy are the most remarkably destitute of faith; in other words, are, of all men living, the greatest of infidels.”\*

This passage has been cited, not for the purpose of animadverting on it, much less of refuting it; but to show to what lengths of extravagance men will go, in defence of a favourite opinion; and also as a curiosity in theological reasoning. It may be, then, that the world has been hitherto entirely mistaken in considering atheists, unbelievers; for we are here taught that they may possess the saving grace of faith, in great perfection, although they believe not one word in the Bible, nor even that there is a God. And as for the clergy—here the venom of the writers’ spirit is exhibited—they are

\* Westminster Review, No. xi. p. 20. 21.

not merely may be, but are, as was before demonstrated, believe what they may, and sincerely as they may, the greatest infidels in the world. We Americans are certainly far behind our transatlantic brethren of the quill, in the liberality of our opinions. Such profound reasoning as is here given, would not only not be admired, but not even understood by our most intelligent readers.

The true doctrine, as it appears to us, in relation to man's responsibility for his belief, may be summed up in the following particulars :

1. Those truths which are self-evident, or the proof of which is demonstrative and perfectly clear, are believed by necessity; that is, the constitution of our minds is such, that we cannot do otherwise than believe them. We cannot disbelieve them by any effort. In regard to such truths as these, there can be no merit in believing, nor is there any moral quality in assent thus given.

2. There are other truths, the evidence of which is not so obvious and convincing as to place them beyond the reach of doubt or contradiction: and yet these having no relation to duty, men may differ about them, and be equally innocent. In such a case, our opinions are not the proper objects of moral approbation or disapprobation.

3. There may be truths which have an important relation to human duty, which, however, are so situated as to evidence, in relation to some persons, that, although they may be diligent and honest in the search of truth, they may not be able to discern them. As, for example, if a man in the centre of China or Thibet, who had never heard of the Bible, should be sincerely desirous to know whether the great Creator had ever made any revelation of his will to men, he might not be able, by all the industry which he could use, and all the inquiries he could make, to satisfy himself on this important point. But supposing this to be the state of the facts, it is evident that his doubt, or disbelief, although inconsistent with the truth, would be no object of moral disapprobation.

4. Again, there is a large class of practical truths, so situated as to evidence, that the knowledge of them is fairly attainable by the diligent and impartial inquirer; while they will be almost certainly hid from the view of men who are strongly under the influence of pride, avarice, or the predominant love of pleasure. In regard to this whole class—

and it is a numerous one—men are responsible for their erroneous belief, if they are for any thing.

This opinion is not founded on any speculative reasoning; it is the dictate of common sense; and is confirmed by the judgment of unprejudiced men in every age and every country, where the inhabitants are capable of forming an opinion on such subjects. How does it come to pass that all men are so prone to form opinions favourable to their own interests? Are they not swayed by an inordinate self-love? Are not opinions formed under the influence of such feelings wrong? When a man judges that, in a certain controversy, his neighbour has injured him, or is indebted to him, while impartial spectators declare the contrary to be the fact, is there no evil in these selfish opinions? A man has it in his power to relieve a number of suffering poor; but having long indulged and pampered his avarice, under the influence of this sordid passion, he has persuaded himself, that he is under no obligation to help the poor; that charity of this kind only tends to foster indolence and improvidence. Is there no demerit in such opinions, thus contracted? Suppose a man to have taken offence at another, because his pride was not regarded and gratified; and suppose, that through resentment and malevolence, he ascribes the most virtuous conduct of his neighbour to the basest and most sinister motives, is there no moral obliquity in such opinions? But, I need not pursue this topic; the truth is too evident to require any further illustration. It may, however, be proper before we dismiss the subject, to state a case, which is, probably, the very one that has given rise to all these speculations about men's irresponsibility for their belief and opinions. We will suppose that God has given a revelation to man, which contains many truths offensive to the pride, and disgusting to the taste of certain learned philosophers: the consequence is, that they refuse to give the evidences of this revelation a careful and impartial examination. Or, depending on their own reason as a sufficient guide, they adopt certain opinions and maxims which are repugnant to the truths and principles of revelation; and thus, undertaking to bring these truths to the test of their own reason, they proudly reject them: concluding, that God never could have made such a communication to men. And, upon the same principles, they might adopt the opinion that God never made such a world as this, in which we live; for the analogy between the Bible and crea-

tion is remarkably close. These philosophic men having come to a conclusion, unfavourable to the claims of Christianity, the religion of the country where they dwell, feel that they are, in consequence of their free opinions, subjected to a certain degree of obloquy, as unbelievers: they therefore labour to remove all ground of reproach, by maintaining that, in no case, is any man responsible for his belief or opinions. But they gain very little by this principle, if it should be conceded to them; for, they admit, that every man is deeply responsible for the manner in which he deals with evidence; or for the sincerity, diligence, and impartiality, with which he examines into the evidence of truth. It matters not whether censure falls upon a man for holding a particular opinion, or for the corrupt feelings which led him to adopt it; the consequences will be precisely the same, as it relates to public opinion, in relation to the character of the individual. The man who has arrived at false opinions by unfaithful dealing with evidence, is just as guilty, and will be as justly condemned, as if our moral disapprobation was confined to the act of assent, by which he adopts certain opinions of his own.

It does not appear to us, therefore, that any thing is gained by the new theory of ethics, in preventing censure or persecution, for the sake of difference in opinion. It might, upon the same principles, and with just as much plausibility, be argued, that no external actions were proper objects of approbation or condemnation; since, considered separately from the motives producing them, actions can possess no moral quality. But, if it is at the same time admitted, that men are accountable for the motives from which their actions proceed, it amounts to the same thing as if the moral quality attached to the action. Just so in regard to belief or opinion, however it may be represented as no proper object of moral consideration; yet, if the state of mind from which it results, is moral, it comes in the end to the very same thing. Indeed, both as it relates to opinions and actions, when we speak of them as censurable or commendable, we include the motive or disposition from which the action or opinion flows. If a man believes his neighbour to be a vile hypocrite, and ascribes all his most virtuous actions to base motives, not because there is any good evidence that this is the fact, but because he has long cherished hatred towards him, in the view of every impartial mind he is criminal for the uncharitable opinion which he entertains. This must be acknow-

ledged, or all idea of moral obligation, and of a difference between virtue and vice, must be relinquished.

And, finally, this theory destroys itself; for if a man be responsible for none of his opinions, then he is not responsible for believing that men are responsible for their opinions. Be it an error; yet, no man is culpable merely for entertaining an erroneous opinion. We may, therefore, innocently believe that the opinions of men are proper objects of moral approbation or condemnation. Thus we arrive at the very point which these philosophers have so assiduously endeavoured to avoid. Nor can this consequence be evaded by resorting to the principle, that we are accountable for the impartiality and diligence with which we form our opinions, on important practical subjects; for, if we entertain the opinion that truth is unimportant or unattainable, there can exist no moral obligation on us, to use diligence or exercise impartiality, in its investigation.

We are fully persuaded, therefore, that no principle more hostile to the best interests of truth and sound morality, has been for a long time inculcated; and coming from men whose opinions have acquired so great influence with the intelligent public, and being defended by writers of so much apparent candor and philosophical acumen, as the author of these *Essays*, there is just cause for alarm to the friends of morality; to say nothing of the bearing of these doctrines, on divine revelation. And what adds to the danger is, that the poison is so subtle that few readers perceive it, until they have imbibed the deleterious potion. We are persuaded, that the publishers and venders of these "*Essays*" in this country, had no idea that they were putting principles into circulation, the tendency of which is to subvert all sound morality.

The remaining principle which we propose to examine, is not less important, than that already considered. It is, "whether any kind or degree of testimony is sufficient to establish a fact which is a deviation from the known laws of nature?" This subject is treated, in the second of the little volumes, which stand at the head of this article. The *Essay* in which it is discussed, is entitled, "*The uniformity of causation explaining the fundamental principle of all evidence and expectation.*"

The ingenious author commences his *Essay*, by laying down the necessity of admitting some truths which do not depend for their proof on logical deduction. In this he agrees with



all modern philosophers of any note; and the thing is too evident to be doubted or denied. He next proceeds to state, the manner in which our belief in the uniformity of causation is obtained. When we have become acquainted, by observation, with the operation of any natural causes, we cannot avoid the belief, that these causes, in similar circumstances, will produce the same effects. Our author informs us, "that Mr. Hume was the first who distinctly showed that the uniformity of causation was not an inference from any other truth; that it was not a logical consequence of any principle or proposition previously admitted; that in applying the past to the future there was a step taken by the mind which required explanation." We feel very little disposed to compliment any philosopher for distinctly making known, what all men know by the reason with which they are endowed, and which we cannot but believe, however philosophers may attempt to puzzle or confound us. What explanation was requisite, in "applying the past to the future," is not apparent. In our opinion, we are not in the least indebted to any one, or to all the philosophers, for our certain belief of the first principles of truth. We have it from the Author of our being. And if any philosopher has merited a claim to the gratitude of the world in relation to such truths, it has been by detecting and refuting the sophistry by which others endeavoured to perplex the first principles of truth.

The writer admits, however, that Mr. Hume, whom he denominates, "a great metaphysician," fell into some errors on this subject, which were corrected by Reid, Stewart, and Brown.

In the second chapter of this Essay, on the uniformity of causation, the author seems to think, that although the relation between a present fact and a future one of a similar kind, has been distinctly and repeatedly noticed, yet the connexion between the present and the past has not been very particularly brought into view by philosophical writers. Incidentally, indeed, he admits, that it has been assumed, and has become the basis of reasonings by one and another; but he seems to claim the credit of being the first who clearly exhibited the subject in this view. Now, we confess, that upon the broad principle of the uniformity of causation, the operation of a cause, in time past, and in future, is so identical, that we cannot understand how any one who admits the first, can fail to perceive the second. If the general principle be evi-

dent, that the same cause uniformly produces the same effect, it must be equally true, in regard to the past, present, and future. The difference of time makes no difference whatever in our belief of the identity of the effect produced. It is a circumstance which is not perceived to have the least influence on the matter.

It seems to us, therefore, that no credit is due to this author for the distinct and particular application of the general principle of the uniformity of causation to past events. What the author has said, in the fourth and fifth chapters, in illustration of the application of this principle to moral, as well as physical causes, is more important, because, in relation to this point, there is more scepticism prevalent, as it respects the application of the general principle. Indeed, there are many, and some of no mean name, who will not agree that the same laws of causation which are acknowledged to be true in physics, are at all applicable to mind. But to us it appears, that what this writer has here said, and what he has more fully argued in the ninth chapter, on the subject of necessity, is entirely just. That every thing which is produced must have an adequate cause, is as true of mental, as of physical phenomena; and it is equally certain, that the same causes will uniformly produce the same effects, in the moral, as in the natural world. To suppose the contrary, is to confound the clearest principles of reason and common sense; and to rush at once into the region of absurdity. If any thing, whether a thought, a volition, or the most evanescent emotion, can take place without any causation, we cannot see why, on the same principles, the universe might not start into existence without a cause. Reason is not more shocked with the one absurdity than the other. And if a moral cause could be supposed to be followed by one effect at one time, and by a different effect at another, the cause being precisely the same in both cases, it would as directly impugn the principle of the uniformity of causation, as if fire at one time should burn paper, and at another produce no effect on it, although as fully subjected to its power. The reasons why moral causes are commonly thought to be less certain in their operation than those which are physical, are satisfactorily given by our author.

But we now proceed to the discussion of the main point, which we have undertaken to examine. And that no injustice may be done to the ingenious author, on whom we remark, we will cite, at some length, his own words:

“But it is only a small part of our knowledge of past events which we gather from physical evidence. By far the most important source of information of such events, is the testimony of human beings; and it is a curious, interesting, and momentous inquiry, whether we proceed on the same principle, when we avail ourselves of this moral evidence to penetrate into the past, as when we make use of that which is purely of a physical character.

“Testimony must be either oral or written. As far as the mere physical circumstances are concerned, we evidently commence our use of it, by reasoning from effects to causes. We infer, for example, that the writing before us, has been the work of some human being, in doing which, we of course assume the uniformity of causation. If, from the circumstances attending the testimony, we infer, that it is entitled to be received as veracious; if, for instance, we find it has proceeded from a man of tried integrity, and who acted under the influence of motives which render it unlikely that he should deceive, our inference still proceeds on the assumption of the same principle. I may have in other cases found these circumstances to have been the precursors or causes of true testimony: but how can I or any one tell that they have operated in the same way, in the instance before me? The reply must evidently be, that it is impossible to avoid assuming that the same causes have invariably the same effects.

“In fact, if we examine any of the rules which have been laid down for the reception of testimony, or any of those remarks which have been pointed out as enabling us to judge of its credibility, we shall find them all involving the uniformity of causation. It is allowed, on all hands, that the concurrence of a number of witnesses in the same assertion, their reputation for veracity, the fact of the testimony being against their own interest, the probability of detection in any false statements, are all circumstances enhancing the probability of what they affirm. These are considered as general principles on the subject gathered from experience, and we apply them instinctively to any new case which may be presented to us, either in the course of our own observation, or as having taken place at some former period. But it is obvious from what has just been said, that since we assume a uniformity in the succession of causes and effects, we cannot transfer our experience from any one case to another. That circumstances have produced true testimony in one or a hundred instances, can be no reason why they should produce it in a different instance, unless we assume that the same causes have necessarily the same effects.

“It is clearly known by this reasoning, that in the reception of

testimony and the use of physical evidence, we proceed on the same principle. But, in the case of testimony, there is a peculiarity not belonging to physical evidence. In the former, we not only have certain effects from which it is our task to infer the causes, or certain causes from which to infer the effects; as when we judge the writing before us to have been the work of some human being, or the testimony to be true on account of the circumstances under which it was given; but the testimony itself consists of the assertion of facts, and the nature of the facts asserted often forms part of the grounds on which the veracity of the testimony is determined: it frequently happens, that while external circumstances tend to confirm the testimony, the nature and circumstances of the facts attested render it highly improbable that any such facts which have taken place; and these two circumstances may be so exactly equivalent, as to leave the mind in irremediable doubt. In the consideration of both, however, the same assumption is involved. We think the facts improbable, because we have found them rarely occurring under the circumstances stated; we think the testimony likely to be true, because we have generally found true testimony to proceed from witnesses acting under the influence of similar motives, and what we have found in other cases we are irresistibly led to conclude, must also happen in the case before us.

“The opposition of the circumstances of the evidence and the nature of the facts, may be carried still further. Assertions are frequently made, which, in themselves, imply a breach of the uniformity of causation. From such causes the conclusions already established remove all difficulty. To weigh probabilities, to determine what credit is due to two sets of conflicting circumstances, neither of which, as far as our knowledge extends, is irreconcilable to the usual course of nature, is often a new and arduous task; but, if the principles of this essay are correct, it is easy to see what reception ought to be given to assertions professedly implying a deviation from the uniform succession of causes and effects.

“Suppose, for instance, any person to affirm, that he had exposed a cubic inch of ice, to a temperature of 200 degrees of Fahrenheit, and that at the expiration of an hour, it had retained its solidity. Here is a sequence of events asserted, which is entirely at variance with the admitted course of nature; and the slightest reflection is sufficient to show, that, to believe the assertion, would involve a logical absurdity. The intrinsic discrepancy of the facts, could never be overcome by any possible proofs of the truth of testimony.

“For, let us put the strongest case imaginable; let us suppose,

that the circumstance of the ice remaining unmelted, rests on the concurrent testimony of a great number of people—people, too, of reputation, science, and perspicacity, who had no motive for falsehood, who had discernment to perceive, and honesty to tell the truth, and whose interests would essentially suffer from any departure from veracity. Under such circumstances it may be allowed, false testimony is impossible.

“Now mark the principle on which this representation proceeds. Let us consider the positions, that what is attested by a great number of witnesses must inevitably be true,—that people of reputation and intelligence, without any apparent motive for falsehood, are invariably accurate in their testimony—and that they are, above all, incapable of violating the truth, when a want of veracity would be ruinous to their own interests. Granting all this, I ask the objector, how he knows these things are so: that men of character and in these circumstances speak the truth? He will reply, that he has invariably found them to act in this manner: but why because you have found them to act in this manner in a few or even in many cases within your own experience, or in the experience of ages, do you conclude, that they have acted so in all cases, and in the case before us? The only answer, is, that it is impossible not to take it for granted, that in precisely similar circumstances, similar results will ensue, or that like causes have always like effects.

“Thus, on the ground of the uniformity of causation, he would be maintaining the competency of testimony to prove a fact, which implies a deviation from that uniformity.

Again,

“These considerations appear to establish the important rule, that no testimony can prove any deviation from the known sequences of cause and effect, or that, at any time, similar effects have not had similar causes, or similar causes similar effects.

“In the strongest conceivable case, the argument of an advocate for the power of testimony to favour such deviations, would be this: ‘It is impossible that human testimony should not be true in these circumstances, because its falsity would be contrary to the principles of human nature; that is, it would imply a deviation from that sequence of motives and voluntary actions which has invariably been observed.’

“But, on precisely the same ground he ought to maintain, that the circumstances attested could not take place, because they are contrary to the laws of the material world, unless it can be shown, as I have before remarked, that the certainty or uniformity of causation in voluntary actions, is greater than in physical events.

“The rule now laid down is, that in fact, that by which man-

kind are universally, though, perhaps, not uniformly nor consciously guided. Let us take another case as an illustration. If a number of men should swear, that they had seen the mercury of a barometer remain at the height of 30 inches, when placed in the exhausted receiver of an air-pump, their testimony would be instantly rejected. The universal conclusion would be, that such an event was impossible. To justify the rejection of the evidence, it would not be necessary to account for so extraordinary a statement, or to have the concatenation of motives in the minds of those who asserted its truth. The motives of the witnesses might be quite inconceivable; there might be no apparent advantage to any of them in hazarding a falsehood: on the contrary, their rank in life, their reputation, their habits of integrity, the disgraceful consequences of detection, might appear irresistible dissuasions from a course of deceit. But, although these circumstances might concur in rendering their veracity probable, no man of science would listen to their evidence. People might be perplexed to account for their conduct, but all would agree as to the credit due to their statements."

We have made these extended extracts, that our readers might not only understand fully the opinions of our author, but might be put in possession of the strength of his argument in favour of them.

Every person, at all conversant with the subject, cannot but perceive that we have Hume's celebrated argument against miracles in a new dress, or, rather, in disguise: for it is remarkable, that in this whole Essay, not one word is said respecting miracles; nor is their any direct mention of divine revelation. Doubtless there was design in this. The author was unwilling to arouse the prejudices of the friends of revelation; he has, therefore, discussed the subject in the abstract, as though he had never heard of the claims of miracles as proofs of the Christian religion. This method of stealing a march on the friends of divine revelation might, perhaps, be considered as insidious, and furnish just ground of complaint on their part. We are not disposed, however, to take umbrage at the manner in which this subject has been brought forward, but shall proceed to a direct and candid examination of the principles so confidently asserted by this writer.

And, that we may not lose our time in the useless discussion of points not relevant to the main subject, we shall at once endeavour to exhibit the true point in controversy, and offer a few remarks intended to show the fallacy of the reasoning employed by the writer, whose essay is under review.

And, in the commencement, we would remark, that we do not, in the least, question the truth of the general proposition, which lies at the foundation of this author's argument. We do admit most readily and fully, "that the same causes produce the same effects;" and this is so generally acknowledged, that the pains taken in this Essay to render it evident, are, in our opinion, wholly unnecessary. This general principle does not involve, in any degree, the point at issue. But while we are so ready to concede this first principle, we are no how disposed to yield what this author seems to consider the same thing; namely, "that there never has been, nor can be, any deviation from the established laws of nature." Here, in our opinion, lies the whole fallacy of the reasoning in this Essay. The ingenious author rightly lays it down as a first principle, "that causation is uniform, or, that the same causes will uniformly produce the same effects;" but when he asserts, that to believe in a deviation from "the admitted causes of nature, is a logical absurdity," he places the matter on entirely different ground. To understand this matter distinctly, let us recur to the fact which he supposes, that some one should "assert that he had exposed a cubic inch of ice to a temperature of 200 degrees of Fahrenheit, and that at the expiration of an hour it had retained its solidity." This is the instance which he gives to illustrate his views of the uniformity of causation. This is the fact which he asserts could never be rendered credible "by any possible proofs of the truth of testimony." The first question which occurs in regard to this case is, does the truth of the fact supposed violate the general principle of the uniformity of causation? We say it does not. No man who believed such a fact would suppose that the cause was in this case the same, as that which commonly met our observation in similar external circumstances. Every man would conclude, on observing such a fact, that some extraordinary cause, not usually witnessed, was in operation. To believe that the same cause without any change, produces different effects, at different times, is one thing; but to believe, that while external circumstances are similar, an invisible and extraordinary cause is at work to produce an effect different from what is usual, is quite another thing. The artful confounding of these two things, which are manifestly distinct, is the ground of all the specious plausibility which the reasoning

in this Essay possesses. The true point at issue, therefore, is, not whether the same causes are always attended with the same effects; but it is, whether, besides the common laws of nature, there may not occasionally be supernatural causes in operation? and, whether, effects thus produced, may not be rendered credible by testimony? It is, whether the Great Author of the course of nature may not sometimes suspend the laws of nature, for wise and important purposes? If the supposition had been, that the laws of nature being alone in operation, ice remained unmelted at 200 degrees of temperature, then the conclusion of the author would be firm, on the general principle, that similar causes will always produce similar effects; but if it be asserted that a divine power has been interposed to suspend or change the laws of nature, the question is entirely changed. It is no longer whether the very same cause may produce a different effect; but whether external appearances being the same, there may not be a different effect produced by the operation of some extraordinary cause? Whether such an effect can be established by any testimony, may be a question, but it is entirely a different question from the one presented by this writer, whether an event which interferes with the uniformity of causation can be proved by testimony. We are not a little surprized, that an author so acute and discriminating, should not have perceived, that he was confounding things entirely distinct; especially, as in this very Essay he recognizes the very distinction which should have been admitted here, which is brought forward to answer a common objection against the uniformity of the operation of moral causes. After giving some instances of diversity in the effects when the causes were apparently the same, he remarks, "In all these cases there is no want of faith in the uniformity of causation: our uncertainty by no means relates to the principle itself, but to the point *whether all the same causes, and no other, are in operation*; and if the event, at any time, turn out contrary to our expectations, we feel well assured of the presence of some extraordinary cause—an assurance evidently proceeding on the assumption, that if the causes had been the same, the effects must also have been similar." pp. 176, 177. Now let this distinction, so correctly made in this case, be applied to a deviation from the usual course of nature, and all difficulty about a violation of the uniformity of causes will vanish. When an effect is produced different from what has been ob-



served usually to take place, in similar circumstances; let us only suppose, as in the case cited, that there is some extraordinary cause at work; and while we make this supposition, we do not deny the uniformity of causation, but "proceed on the assumption, that if the causes had been the same, the effects must have been similar."

Having cleared the subject of this difficulty, we are now prepared to examine the question which is really in controversy, and which is no other than this, "Whether an event which implies a deviation from the sequence of causes, or from the established laws of nature, can be proved by any testimony, however strong?" There is still another question, however, which must be settled with this author, before we can proceed to the main point; and that is, "Is such an event, as involves a real deviation from the laws of nature, possible?" We certainly should not have judged it necessary to discuss this question with a theist,—and such we understand this writer professes to be—were it not, that in a subsequent chapter of this same *Essay*, he roundly asserts, that all such events are impossible. His words, (p. 212,) are, "An event is impossible which contradicts our experience, or which implies, that the same causes have produced different effects. Thus, when we pronounce, that it is impossible for a piece of ice to remain in the midst of burning coals without being dissolved, our conclusion involves a complete knowledge of this particular effect of fire on ice, as well as the assumption that what has taken place in our own experience must always have occurred under precisely the same circumstances. If I am not greatly deceived, the acutest reasoner, the closest thinker, the most subtile analyser of words, will find himself unable to produce any other meaning of the term impossible, than that which is here assigned to it." Now, this definition of the word, impossible, is passing strange to us. What! will this author allow nothing to the power of God? Will he deny to the Creator the power of suspending his own laws, which he has impressed on the universe? Is it true, that the Almighty cannot prevent the melting of a piece of ice in the fire? Surely, no theist will be so insane as to maintain this. Where, then, is the impossibility of events occurring which are deviations from the sequence of natural causes?

The author, upon a review of what he has here written concerning possibility and impossibility, seems to have felt some dubiety about the correctness of his definition; for, not-

withstanding his challenge to men of the nicest discrimination and acutest reasoning powers, to invent any other meaning of the word impossible, than the one he had given, for he himself gives us another in a foot-note, which comes much nearer the truth, than the one in the text, and very different from it.

Impossibility, according to the definition given by our author, in the passage cited, is nothing else than a deviation from the established course of nature. If it could be assumed as a certainty, that the Great Author of the Universe never would interpose his immediate agency contrary to the usual and established course of events, then there might be some ground for the assertion, that a departure from the course of nature was an impossibility. But this is a position too important, in this controversy, to be assumed without the clearest proof; and yet, we are persuaded, that not the shadow of evidence ever has, or can be adduced, to prove, that the Maker of the world will never exert his power to suspend or alter, on some occasion, those laws which he has established. As to his physical power to cause a deviation from these laws, it would be idle to waste time in proving it, since the denial of such a power in deity, is denying his very existence. A God who could not control and govern, at will, his own creatures, has none of the attributes of God. But it may be alleged, that his plan is so perfect that he never can have occasion to interpose his power to alter any thing which he has ordained. Very good; but who can tell us what the plan of the Almighty is, and that such an immediate interposition of his agency, on certain occasions, may not be an important part of his original plan? It is not for short-sighted creatures, such as we are, to say what is or is not consistent with the plan of Him who is infinite in knowledge. If the thing be possible, and not repugnant to the moral attributes of God, no one has a right to assert, that it may not exist. And in regard to events which merely imply the exertion of divine power in a different way from what is usual, there is not the shadow of evidence, that they are in any respect inconsistent with the character of the Supreme Being. For what are the laws of nature, but modes of the divine operation; and if generally his power is exerted according to a uniform rule, yet this general uniformity does not lay him under any obligation, never, on any occasion, to depart from the course established. It would be an unreasonable limitation of the Maker and Governor of the universe, to

confine Him perpetually, to one mode of operation. There are, indeed, strong reasons why the laws of nature should be uniform in their ordinary operation; but there may also exist strong reasons for an occasional deviation from the common course: and the same wisdom which dictated the establishment of such regular laws, may also dictate, that, for the accomplishment of special objects of importance, it may be highly proper to deviate from them. And as it relates to this point, it matters not whether we adopt the theory, that the operation of the laws of nature is the agency of God himself, according to rules which he has established, or maintain, that in the formation of the universe, he communicated certain powers and active properties to inanimate nature; for as, in the first case, it is evident, that God who is infinitely free and sovereign, can, at pleasure, change his own operation; so, in the other, it is equally obvious, that he who communicated certain powers to matter, is able, according to his will, to control and suspend the operation of these second causes. The conclusion is, therefore, most manifest, that there is nothing absurd or impossible in the idea of a deviation from the sequence of causes, as they ordinarily take place in the regular course of the laws of nature. Whether, in fact, there are any such events, is a matter not to be determined by any reasoning on general principles, but in the manner in which we come to the knowledge of all facts, by experience, observation, and testimony. And all we have aimed at in the preceding remarks, is to show, that there exists no such presumption against facts of this particular kind, as would render it unreasonable to credit them, provided they are accompanied by such evidence as satisfies the mind of an impartial inquirer.

The question which we now have to discuss is precisely the same as that treated by Mr. Hume, in his celebrated *Essay on Miracles*. The author, whose work we are considering, attempts to reduce us precisely to the same dilemma, as did Mr. Hume his readers, by a complete equipoise of evidence. The case is thus stated: A fact is supposed to be attested by such a force of testimony, that there is nothing wanting to render it satisfactory; the witnesses are intelligent; of known integrity; would suffer injury by a false statement; are sufficiently numerous; and are harmonious and consistent in the testimony which they deliver. Such testimony, it is acknowledged, if it stood alone, would be competent to command our unwavering assent: but a counteraction may arise from the nature of

the facts attested: they may imply that the same causes do not always produce the same effects; but this would be to contradict a plain axiom of common sense, confirmed by universal experience. Here, then, we have complete evidence on both sides of a proposition; and of course we can believe in neither. The rational mind, in such circumstances, can neither believe nor disbelieve; it must remain neutral. But our ingenious author, after bringing us to this apparent equipoise of evidence, by which all assent is rendered impossible, affords us some relief, by discovering that the evidence from testimony never can be as convincing as that which we have for the uniformity of causation. "The causes of testimony," he observes, "or in other words, those considerations which operate on the mind of the witnesses, cannot be always ascertained; and as we are uncertain as to the causes in operation, we cannot be certain of the effects; we cannot be sure that the circumstances of the witnesses are such as have before given rise to true testimony, and consequently we cannot be sure, that the testimony is true." According to this view, we can be absolutely certain of nothing, the knowledge of which is obtained by testimony: but every man's experience will contradict this statement; for who needs to be informed, that there are thousands of facts, known no otherwise than by testimony, of the certainty of which we have no more doubt than of our own existence. Supposing then the fact which is contrary to the uniformity of causation, to be attended with testimony of this kind, the equipoise must exist.

But there is one consideration which seems equally to have escaped the notice of Mr. Hume and this Essayist. It is, that the same contrariety of evidence, and consequent equipoise, destroying all assent, must take place between the evidence of our senses and the uniformity of causation; for there is no reason why this equipoise, and mutual destruction of conflicting evidence, should exist in relation to testimony alone: the very same thing must necessarily occur, if a fact be observed by our senses, which is contrary to the established course of nature. Thus, if we should see with our own eyes a cubic inch of ice placed in a temperature of 200 degrees of Fahrenheit, and should distinctly observe, that it remained unmelted at the expiration of an hour, we could not believe the fact; for although nothing can be more certain to us than what we see; yet as this fact implies, that the same causes do not always produce the same effects; and as this is a self-evident truth,

the mind, between these conflicting and equally balanced evidences, must remain in a state of perfect neutrality; neither believing nor disbelieving the fact. And this effect must take place, however frequently we might witness the fact, or whatever number of persons should concur with us, as to the nature of the fact observed. For however certain we might be, that we saw the ice unmelted, yet no certainty from the evidence of sense can be greater than that which we have that the same causes will always produce the same effects.

Thus would these philosophers, by their abstract and metaphysical reasonings, persuade us to disbelieve even the evidence of our own senses. It is true, as was observed, that neither this writer nor Mr. Hume has pushed the argument to this consequence, nor do they seem to have been aware of it; but we think it must be evident to every impartial mind, that the difficulty which they have so forcibly and confidently presented, is as applicable to the evidence of the senses, as to that of testimony. But whether, if we should witness a fact in direct contrariety to the known and established laws of nature, we should hesitate to believe it, is a thing not to be determined by abstract reasoning on general principles; every man is capable of deciding it for himself. Indeed, the effect which any kind of evidence will have on the mind can only be known by experience; and on this ground we may assert, that what a man plainly and repeatedly sees he will believe. If any plain, sensible man should see ice remain unmelted at 200 degrees of Fahrenheit, he would not need to refer to the uniformity of causation, or any other abstract principle, before he gave his assent. He would, indeed, esteem it an extraordinary phenomenon, for which he could not account; and he might at first be ready to suppose that there was something deceptive in the appearance; but if, after repeated and thorough examinations, he should find that it was a reality; and, especially, if he found that the same impression was made on a multitude of other persons, he could not do otherwise than believe the fact to be, as it appeared to his senses. And such an observer would experience no difficulty in giving his assent, from any equipoise of conflicting evidence, which might be supposed to exist. Indeed, if such a fact were witnessed by a dozen intelligent men, not one of them would conclude that there was an infringement of the uniformity of causation; or that the same effects did not always follow the same causes; but the supposition of every one of them

would be, that there was an extraordinary cause in operation, to which the observed effect must be ascribed. No one would be so foolish as to suppose, that if heat operated according to the laws which usually regulate it, and no other cause was concerned in the effect, that ice would remain unmelted for an hour, in such a temperature. In all cases where an effect different from the ordinary one in the same circumstances takes place, we are instinctively led to the supposition of the operation of an extraordinary cause, although we may be entirely ignorant of its nature. But when a real deviation from the laws of nature is observed, the rational conclusion is, that the power of God must have been interposed; since none has power to control or suspend the laws of nature but he that established them: and such an event is properly called a miracle. Now, although it requires strong evidence to satisfy an impartial mind of the existence of a miracle, the difficulty of believing in such a fact, does not in the least depend upon the principle assumed by the Essayist; namely, that such an event implies a violation of the uniformity of causation: for as has been shown, that idea never enters the mind of any one. The difficulty in believing in a miracle is owing to the presumption, arising from common experience, that the laws of nature will remain the same; and from the circumstance that we may never before have witnessed an event of this kind. But the thought that the thing is impossible to divine power, would never be likely to enter into any unsophisticated mind; and nothing would be requisite to produce the fullest conviction of its truth, but the opportunity of observing it in circumstances favourable to a distinct view of the fact. And when the miracle is attended by such evidence as commands assent, such as that of our own senses, no difficulty of crediting the fact would ever be experienced, on account of the uniformity of causation, or on any other account whatever.

If the preceding observations are correct, as it relates to facts which fall under the observation of the senses, the same conclusions will be true in regard to facts made known to us by testimony, of the strongest kind. It is true, this writer seems to maintain, that there is always some uncertainty in the information derived from this source. "The causes of testimony," says he, "or those considerations which operate on the minds of the witnesses, cannot always be ascertained; and as we are uncertain as to the causes in operation, we cannot be certain of the effects; we cannot be sure that the circumstances of the witnesses are such as

have given rise to true testimony, and, consequently, we cannot be sure that the testimony is true." According to this doctrine, testimony can in no case whatever lay a rational foundation for unhesitating assent to any fact. However numerous, and however respectable the witnesses, and whatever may be their circumstances, "we cannot be sure that the testimony is true." But is this statement correct? Is it not in direct repugnance to the experience and conviction of every man? How do most of us know, that there is in the world such a country as France, or Great Britain? Is it not by testimony? And can we not be certain respecting this, and a thousand other matters, which we know only by the information of others? Does any intelligent man doubt any more whether there lately existed in Europe such a man as Napoleon Bonaparte, or such a man as the Duke of Wellington? The truth is, that every man is conscious of believing thousands of facts on the testimony of others with fully as much certainty as he does the things which pass before his eyes; and it would be in vain to tell men that they might be deceived in any case where their knowledge depended on testimony, "because we cannot be sure that the testimony is true;" we might as well attempt to persuade them that they did not perceive the light which was shining around them, or even that they did not exist. This being a subject on which every man's own convictions are sufficient, no argument is needed. The case is as plain as it can be. Admitting, then that testimony may be such as to remove all doubt or uncertainty, as much as the evidence of the senses or of consciousness, the question is, supposing testimony of this kind to exist in support of a fact which implies a deviation from the regular operation of the laws of nature, Can we on the ground of such testimony credit the miracle? When the question is thus stated, the doctrine of this philosopher is, in conformity with his prototype, Mr. Hume, that there can arise no rational belief; for, however strong the testimony may be, it cannot be stronger than the intuitive certainty, that the same causes must be followed by the same effects. Our belief in testimony itself, he informs us, is founded on the same principle; for the reason why we believe that witnesses, in certain circumstances, will speak the truth, is, because we have always observed, that when thus situated, they do speak the truth. Now, the fallacy of this statement has already been shown: a principle is assumed which is altogether incorrect; or, rather, a true principle is applied to a case to which it does not belong. It is true, that

the same cause does uniformly produce the same effect: concerning this there is not, nor can there be any dispute. But we have shown, that in the case of a deviation from the laws of nature, there is no need of calling this first principle at all into question. It is not alleged, that the miraculous fact is produced by the simple operation of the laws of nature; but the very contrary is asserted and believed, in every such case. Let the fact be, that some combustible substance, when cast into a hot fire, is not touched by the flame; or, to use the author's favourite illustration, that a piece of ice remains for an hour in a hot fire without being melted. Now, if it was maintained or believed, that no cause operated here but the fire, according to its common properties, there would be an absurdity in the supposition; a cause on one day produces a different effect from what the same cause does on another day. To-day a hot fire melts ice; to-morrow a fire of the same kind does not melt ice. But we venture to affirm, that this is a supposition which was never made by the most credulous of mortals. We believe that no persons, however rude, ever believed in a fact as miraculous, who did not suppose that some other than the common natural cause was in operation to produce that effect. Indeed, this idea enters into every definition of a miracle: it is an effect produced by some supernatural power. How then does such a belief militate with the principle of the uniformity of causation? So far from this, it recognises the axiom, and therefore ascribes the effect not to an ordinary but to an extraordinary cause. Whether, in any given case, the testimony is sufficient, to induce an impartial man to believe in the existence of such a supernatural operation is altogether a different question. The point, and the only point now under discussion is, whether the uniform sequence of effects creates an insuperable bar in the way of our believing in a miracle, or in an event which is a deviation from the common course of nature. And we trust that we have—with some repetition perhaps—made it evident, that this principle of common sense, that the same cause operates uniformly, or as long as it is the same produces the same effects, is, in no degree violated by the belief in miracles; because, in every miracle, it is not only supposed, but explicitly taught, that the effect owes its existence, not to the same cause which operates in the usual course of the laws of nature, but to a divine and supernatural agent, by whose interposition the laws of nature are suspended or counteracted. That an agent capable of producing such an effect



exists in the universe, none but an atheist will deny; and that the Creator of the world will never choose so to interpose as to give a striking evidence of his power and providence, is what no one has any right to assert. What would be our conclusions in regard to this matter, if we were left to reason on the subject, may be doubtful; but when facts are seen by ourselves, or reported to us by a sufficient number of faithful and intelligent witnesses, there remains no rational alternative, but to give due credit to what is thus clearly made known. Multitudes of events which are not miraculous, are, prior to experience, altogether improbable; but when they actually occur before our eyes, or when hundreds of disinterested persons assure us that they have witnessed them, we never make the abstract improbability of their occurrence a reason for disbelieving them. The very same principle applies to miracles. There may be, to our apprehension, a great improbability that the laws of nature will ever be suspended by divine power, but when we ourselves see events by which these laws are contravened, or, when a sufficient number of witnesses agree in attesting such facts, we cannot but receive as true, what we see with our own eyes, and what is reported by men of truth and intelligence. What kind and degree of testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, or a real deviation from the laws of nature, is a thing not to be ascertained by abstract reasoning; but when the evidence is exhibited, and the circumstances of any particular fact understood, no man needs to be informed what he should believe or disbelieve. Indeed, he has no choice in the case, if he only suffers the evidence to be fairly presented to his mind; for, as this writer has abundantly shown, belief in such a case is involuntary, whatever may be said or reasoned, abstractly, respecting the impossibility of believing in a fact which involves a departure from the course of nature; yet, if such a fact be clearly and repeatedly presented to our sight; or if it be attested by hundreds and thousands of persons who have no conceivable motive to assert what is false in the case, we should be constrained in such case to yield our assent; and the man who should in such circumstances, declare that he disbelieved what he saw with his eyes, or was attested by such a number of veracious witnesses, ought to be suspected of falsifying his own convictions, rather than disbelieving his own senses, or rejecting the testimony of a multitude of sensible and impartial witnesses.

When this author asserts, that our belief in testimony arises

from our having observed, that witnesses of a certain character and in certain circumstances do invariably speak the truth, and may therefore itself be resolved into the law of uniform causation, he does but revive Mr. Hume's principle, that our belief in testimony is the effect of experience; an opinion which has been refuted by Doctor George Campbell, of Aberdeen, in his work on Miracles, with a clearness and force, which leaves nothing to be done or desired in regard to this matter. It is there shown that belief in the testimony of others is an ultimate law of our nature, and is prior to and independent of experience; and that the effect of experience on our belief in testimony is rather to weaken it; which is confirmed by the fact that children are more credulous than adults; and prior to the experience of the want of veracity in many, receive indiscriminately as true every thing which is told them. It might, we think, be demonstrated, that if belief in testimony depended on experience, it would be impossible for man to acquire knowledge; but it is not to our purpose, at present, to discuss this subject. We shall, therefore, bring our review of this volume to a close, by an illustration drawn from Sacred History. It is related in the book of Daniel, iii. 20, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, "commanded the most mighty men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men—and these three men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound, into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." While the king surrounded by an immense multitude of people was looking into the furnace, to his astonishment he observed, that the men were walking about unhurt in the midst of the fire, and when they were called, they came forth; and "upon their bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed; neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them." Now, it is not our object to express any opinion respecting the credibility of this fact; but merely to use it by way of illustrating the views which we have given, respecting the effect which would be produced by witnessing such a miracle; or by having it attested in a certain way. We will now suppose, that the facts here recorded did actually take place, and that they were witnessed

by the king and all his courtiers and officers, and by the vast multitude assembled from all the provinces of his empire to worship the golden image which he had erected. A solitary man may be deceived even by his own senses; or rather, his nervous system may be so deranged, that he may take his own imaginations for realities; or the visual organ may be diseased, or the medium through which the light is transmitted may be deceptive; but when we find thousands of people concurring with us in the impression made on their senses, then we are sure that we are not mocked by an apparition, or mere illusion. In the case just stated, the fact was of a nature to be judged of by all; and all are supposed to have seen these men cast into the fiery furnace. We ask, whether in such circumstances any man could disbelieve or doubt? No one will assert it. True, some philosopher might have made a wise speech on the occasion, and might have reasoned abstrusely respecting cause and effect, and the invariable uniformity of causation; he might have cautioned the king and all his counsellors, and the people, not to give credit to what they saw, for it could not be true, since it contradicted an acknowledged axiom; and even if the evidence of their senses appeared ever so clear and convincing, it ought to have no other effect than to bring their minds to an exact equipoise, or perfect suspense of all belief; because the evidence on the other side was equally strong and convincing, being no other than a self-evident truth, to disbelieve which would be "a logical absurdity." What effect may we suppose such philosophical reasoning would have had, when arrayed against the plain testimony of all the senses?

But it may be alleged, that neither Mr. Hume nor his anonymous disciple has asserted, that we could not believe in a miracle, if we had such a fact fairly exhibited before our eyes. This is true; they have not extended their principle so far; but we aver, and think we have proved, that it is as applicable to the evidence of the senses as of testimony. To bring the matter, however, to the very point, on which they are desirous that it should bear; let us suppose that Daniel had been absent on the king's business, but arriving just at the close of the wonderful scene, he hears the same testimony from the king and his counsellors. The men themselves being his particular friends, he interrogates them, and hears a full report of their wonderful deliverance from the power of the fire, of the fate of the men who cast them into the furnace. If mere testimony could have

added to his certainty, thousands and tens of thousands, on every side, were loudly proclaiming their admiration of the miraculous deliverance of these young men. Now, supposing Daniel not to have been a witness of the transaction; but to have received the testimony just mentioned, will any candid man assert, that his persuasion of the truth of the facts was not as firm and as rational, as if he had seen them with his own eyes? And it will be to no purpose to allege, that few facts are ever attested by such evidence as this: there are thousands within the knowledge of every man, of the truth of which he is as fully convinced, as of those which are daily passing before his eyes. And as our object is, not to weigh the different kinds of testimony, and to ascertain their force, but to bring to the test the principle which has been so confidently laid down by this ingenious author; for if his principle was correct, it would make no difference how strong the testimony might be; for the evidence of the uniformity of causation, being an intuitive truth, and as certain as any thing can be, would be sufficient, completely to counterbalance, if it did not overpower, the highest testimony which can be imagined.

If the opinions which we have selected for examination had no intimate connexion with our religious belief, or the practical system of morality, we should have left them to find what acceptance they might, with speculative men; but believing, that the general adoption of the philosophical principles of this author would be subversive of divine revelation, and injurious to sound morality, we have judged it expedient to devote a portion of our pages to an examination and refutation of a theory, which is brought forward with much appearance of candor, and defended with much plausibility.

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#### ART. VI.—THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN LIVINGSTON.

THE conversion of five hundred souls through the instrumentality of a single sermon may seem incredible. Yet this took place in Scotland, two hundred years ago; and what is stranger still, under the preaching of one who, if he were now living, would be thought, by many good men among us, so antiquated a Calvinist, as to be shut out from all hope of usefulness.

In courts of law we often see pleadings, of which the va-